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ABSTRACT

This review of the status of English language instruction in the United Arab Emirates includes an overview of the role of English in the society in general and an outline of the status of English use and instruction in the educational system at all levels (elementary, secondary, higher, vocational, adult, and teacher). Topics covered include: the characteristics and training of English language instructors, the type and availability of instructional materials, educational administration and planning in relation to English teaching, English instruction outside the educational system, British support, and commercial opportunities related to English instruction. It is concluded that the teaching force is neither stable nor highly competent, that the effectiveness of the materials most commonly used is dependent on the inservice training of existing teachers, and that conservatism and inflexibility characterize the educational approach used, but it is noted that the Ministry of Education is supportive of English instruction and inservice teacher education. At the university level, better staffing, remedial instruction, and better support for the proposed subject area courses taught in English are recommended. (MSE)

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ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: United Arab Emirates

Date: May 1986

1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

A recent national census (January 1986) gave the population of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as 1,622,464; fewer than twenty per cent are UAE nationals, the remainder are Indian, and Pakistani (perhaps seventy-five per cent of the work-force), Iranian, Philippino, Sri Lankan, other Arab nationalities (e.g. Egyptian, Jordanian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Sudanese, Yemeni etc.), and European. There are some 22,000 Britons in the UAE (of whom 18,000 live in the northern Emirates) and about 2,400 Americans.

The first language is Arabic but, not surprisingly, many UAE nationals are fluent in English, Farsi and Urdu, in addition to their own language. English and Farsi may be used in the business community while Urdu is used with labourers, domestic staff, taxi drivers and shopkeepers. After Arabic, English is the main language of commerce, banking, industry, hotels and tourism, and training in such diverse fields as computer studies, engineering, the oil industry and the armed forces.

Most UAE nationals have constant exposure to English through contacts with visiting businessmen, foreign delegations, tourists, their own friends and contacts with Britain. Many spend the summer in Britain. There are programmes daily on both radio and television in the UAE, and three excellent English language newspapers, as well as American and British newspapers most of the western European periodicals and journals.

English is regarded as the international language of communication. Some English is considered essential by employers and would-be employees in most fields, though a few of the Ministries (e.g. the Ministry of Education) stipulate that all correspondence should be in Arabic.

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With the coming of Federation in 1971, a national Ministry of Education (with offices in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai) was established and English language was made part of the curriculum. For the first six years the main textbook used was Living English in the Arab World (Stannard Allen) and the series was begun in the fifth year of primary school. English language was taught as a compulsory subject for the remaining eight years of schooling, leading to the Secondary School Leaving Certificate. In each of the eight years, there were eight periods of English per week (seven in the three years of the secondary school scientific section). In addition to the main textbook series, there was one reader from the Longman Structural Reader series prescribed for each year.

2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

English language is a compulsory subject for nine years of the twelve-year school system and is one of the three subjects (Arabic language and religious studies being the others) in which pupils must pass before proceeding to the next grade, i.e. from primary to intermediate (or preparatory) and from intermediate to secondary. The timetable is as follows:

Level	Year	Periods per week
Primary	4	4
Primary	5,6	6
Preparatory	1,2,3	7
Secondary - Arts	1,2,3	7
Secondary - Science	1,2,3	7

Other schools, e.g. religious and vocational schools, have fewer periods per week but use the same textbook series as academic schools. The three technical schools in Dubai, Sharjah and Ras al Khaimah have six periods per week of English language teaching but some technical subjects (e.g. fitting, fabrication, automotive studies) are taught in English, usually by non-native speakers. These subjects are also examined in English. To replace the Crescent English Course in these vocational schools, the Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education is considering using Starting Links (ELTA-OUP) for the academic year 1986-7.

University of the UAE, Al Ain

The University opened in October 1977. The Faculty of Arts included a Department of Linguistics with a small English Language section. This section has now grown into the Department of Foreign Languages in which students take English as a major subject; a few also study French as a minor subject. There are fifteen members of the teaching staff, including two British lecturers with Ph.D.s in twentieth-century literature from British universities. The other staff are mostly from Arab countries and have taken their doctorates at American universities. There is one specialist in French literature.

The students are divided into separate colleges for girls and boys and take a general study course in the first year which covers six university required courses, taught mostly in Arabic: i.e. Islamic studies, Arabic language, logic, statistics, the family system in Islam, and sociology; in addition there is an English language course. In the second year, students can specialize in English language, literature and linguistics.

The English language courses cover speech production and comprehension, paragraph writing, academic reading, and essay writing.

The English literature syllabus prescribes courses in Shakespeare and the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel, and modern literature including American, while the linguistics syllabus includes phonetics and transformational grammar. There is also a course in translation.

UAE University Language Centre

The UAE University Language Centre was established in June 1980 as a research and teaching unit forming part of the Faculty of Arts. The present building, separate from the main University premises and the Faculty of Arts, contains five classrooms, an audio-visual unit, a listening studio, a language laboratory and a well-stocked ELT and linguistics reference library containing some 2,200 volumes.

The main programmes of the University Language Centre are:

1. A course in general English which all students in the first year are required to take, regardless of their specialization.

2. Courses in English for Special Purposes for students majoring in engineering and mass communication. It is planned to set up special courses for students of medicine when the Faculty of Medicine opens in October 1986.

3. Intensive English courses for university demonstrators/research students who have been selected for further study abroad with the eventual aim of joining the UAE university staff when their higher studies are completed.

4. Intensive courses in general English, and also in French, for university administrative staff.

5. Teaching Arabic to non-Arabic speakers.

6. Teaching English to members of the general public in Al Ain.

3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

There are 1,084 teachers of English, distributed as follows:

Level	UAE nationals	Other nationalities	Total
Primary	32 (28 female)	407 (194 female)	439
Preparatory and Secondary	42+ (41 female)	570 (265 female)	612
Religious institutes	nil	21	21
Technical/ Commercial	1	11	12
Totals	75	1,009	1,084

Twenty-seven of the UAE national teachers are working in schools in Dubai Emirate. Thus seven per cent of the English language teachers in the UAE schools are UAE nationals, and of these seventy-nine per cent are female. Of the non-UAE nationals, forty-six per cent are females. The other nationalities represented are Egyptian, Jordanian and Palestinian, with some Sudanese and Syrian.

Over fifty per cent of the English language teachers in the state school system have degrees in English language or literature.

There is no local professional organization for teachers of English.

Teacher Training

There are two institutions concerned with training (English) teachers. The University at Al Ain (opened in 1977) prepares teachers through its B.Ed. programme. Each year, significant numbers of national teachers (especially female) join the state education system.

The Teacher Training Directorate of the Ministry of Education in Abu Dhabi and Dubai is also responsible for training teachers. Two British EFL specialists, both seconded from ELTA-OUP to the UAE Ministry of Education, run a programme of orientation courses (for new teachers), and refresher courses (for experienced teachers) throughout the academic year which runs from mid-September to June. The programme of 'in-service' courses organized for the academic year 1985-6 was as follows:

Phase 1 (October - November 1985)

Orientation course for teachers newly appointed to the UAE. These consisted of a series of four-day (twenty hours) seminars in each of the educational zones. The main aim was to introduce new teachers to the Crescent English Course and its methodology.

Phase 2 (November 1985 - February 1986)

A series of two- to three-day seminars for all teachers in the educational zones.

Phase 3 (March - April 1986)

A further series of two-day seminars, concentrating on language testing.

Refresher courses for experienced teachers

A number of seminars/workshops conducted in various parts of the country on topics such as the communicative teaching of grammar, and communicative language testing.

Since 1977, when the Crescent English Course was first introduced into the UAE school system, the Ministry of Education has been sending inspectors of English and other officials to London for workshops based on problems relating to ELT at school level, particularly those concerned with the Crescent course. The last workshop, held at ELTA-OUP in London was attended by the Chief Inspector of English.

4. MATERIALS SUPPORT

The Crescent English Course (T. O'Neill and P.Snow) published by ELTA-OUP is used. The course was specially written for the Arabian Gulf and is claimed to be an up-to-date, pupil-centred, communicative approach to teaching English. The grounding for this was prepared through ELT seminars held in various parts of the Arab world (Doha, June 1976; Abu Dhabi, January 1977; Cairo and Doha, May 1977) and attended by English language experts from Europe and the Arab world. A number of conferences have also been held in the UK.

The Crescent course is also used in Kuwait and Qatar, is being trialled in Bahrain, and is used extensively in Lebanon.

The Crescent course (UAE version) contains materials for nine years of study. Its teaching package comprises:

For the teacher	For pupils
Teacher's books	Pupil's books
Class cassettes	Pupil's workbooks
Teacher's packs (years 1 and 2)	Pupil's cassettes
Wall sheets	Handwriting books
OHP transparencies	Graded readers
Communicative grammar books	

The success of the new course book series is linked very closely to adequate teacher training programmes, and the programmes described above are now fully accepted by the Ministry of Education as being an integral part of the whole English language teaching syllabus in the country.

English literature is not taught formally in the school system. However there are excerpts from English literature (Shakespeare, Coleridge, Wordsworth and Tennyson) in the main textbook series. Furthermore, an extensive range of supplementary reading material is used throughout primary to secondary school. The standard of reading aimed at may be gauged from the following examples of the books set (selections from the ELTA-OUP Graded Readers series):

Primary

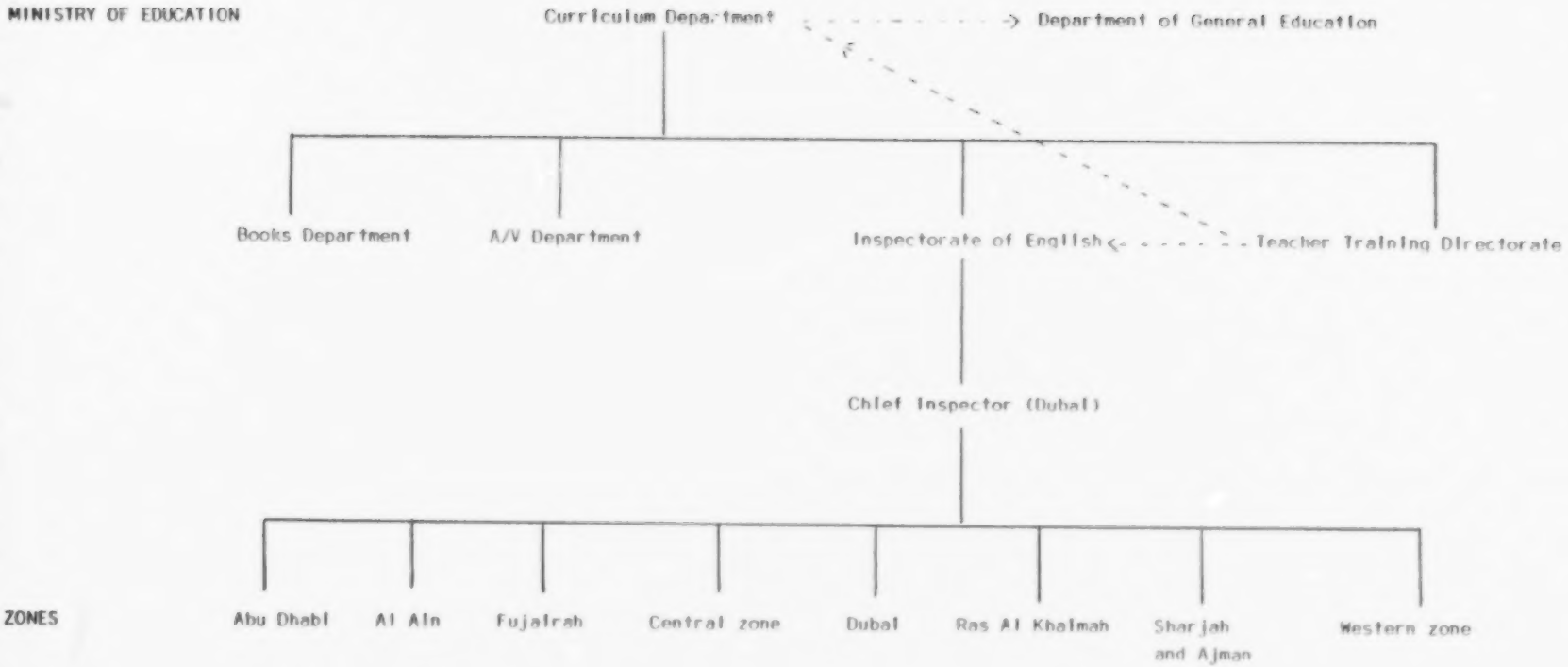
4	John Marsh	1-10
5	Terry O'Neill	In the Forest
6	P.D. McLaughlin	Sad Sam and the Orange Balloon

Preparatory

1	Lilian Murray	Ali and the Dreambird
2	Christine Osborne	The White Falcon
3	Khalil al Hamash	The Marshes of Iraq

Secondary

1	Tessa Potter	The Zinc Ships
2	Mahmud Zayid	The Prophet Muhammad
3	John M. Munro	The Road to Jerusalem



ZONES	Abu Dhabi	Al Ain	Fujairah	Central zone	Dubai	Ras Al Khaimah	Sharjah and Ajman	Western zone
INSPECTORS	4	3	2	1	6	3	3	1
TEACHERS	231	159	101	35	207	119 + 17	138 + 43	34

6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The UAE schools' syllabus is determined by the Inspectorate of the Ministry of Education in conjunction with Curriculum Department. There are twenty-three inspectors, including the Chief Inpsector, distributed throughout the educational zones as follows:

Zone	Number	
Abu Dhabi	4	
Al Ain	3	
Fujairah	2	
Central zone	1	
Dubai	6	(including the Chief Inspector)
Ras Al Khaimah	3	
Sharjah	3	
Western zone	1	
TOTAL	23	

Nationalities

Egyptian	12	(including the Chief Inspector)
Jordanian	3	
Palestinian	2	
UAE national	2	(both female)
Pakistani	1	
Sundanese	1	
South Yemeni	1	
Zanzibari	1	

In 1978 the UAE took over (from Kuwait) the responsibility for setting and marking its own Secondary School Leaving Certificate (al-shihada al-thanawiya al-'ama - or tawjeehee). In theory, this is the responsibility of the UAE University at Al Ain, but in practice the University moderates papers set by the Inspectorate of English.

Entrance to the UAE University, which opened in October 1977, is based on achievement in the Secondary School Leaving Certificate and a pass in English language is compulsory.

7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

A number of private language schools operate in the UAE, the main ones of which are listed below. Each one has to have Ministry of Education approval, and to obtain a trade licence from the local municipality.

Polyglot School (Dubai)

Established in 1969 as a School of Foreign Languages, this now has 130 students of English with 35 other students studying Arabic and European languages as well as secretarial studies. The tuition in English reaches Royal Society of Arts (RSA) 1 and 2 levels, and First Certificate in English (FCE). In 1985, Polyglot presented ten candidates at the FCE examination.

There are five part-time teaching staff and the main textbooks used are First Things First , Streamline , and Kernel Lessons . The language classes take place mainly in the evenings, but the secretarial courses are held in the mornings.

Al Bayyan Language Institute

Established in 1980 and known formerly as 'Queen's Language Institute', the Al Bayyan Institute is affiliated to the Chichester School of Languages in Britain. There are four full-time and five part-time teachers in the school in Sharjah as well as one teacher of Arabic; the school also has a branch in Ras al Khaimah where two British teachers give classes of general English to about thirty-five students. In Sharjah the school has about one-hundred students in its evening programme (with separate classrooms for female students) of fifty to sixty hours per week. However, most of the teaching activity (totalling one-hundred hours per week) is devoted to off-site contract classes for local companies, banks and other training institutions, e.g. oil companies, hospitals, airline offices, Itisalaat (the telecommunications Ministry, which plans its own training institute next year), and Dubal, the Dubai Aluminium Company.

Special courses are offered in banking, business letter and report writing, technical studies and English for the Petroleum Industry (e.g. for employees of the Emirates Gulf Petroleum Company in Dubai).

There are a number of other private language institutes, e.g. Al Farabi Institute and the Dubai International Trade Centre Management Company in Dubai, and the American Language Institute and ABC in Abu Dhabi.

Expatriate and English-medium schools

There are many schools in the UAE, outside the government sector, which cater for the needs of expatriate children, e.g. American, Indian, Iranian, Lebanese, Pakistani. There are also English-medium schools providing a British-style education leading to the General Certificate of Education O- and A-level examinations, including English and Literature. These schools cater mainly for British children, but also a number of UAE nationals and other Arab children whose parents wish them to follow the British system and obtain British qualifications.

British teachers are recruited to these schools either by the British Council (e.g. the Rashid School for Girls, Dubai, the Al Worood and Al Nahda schools in Abu Dhabi), or by the individual school boards.

English Language Examinations - 1985

	GCE	FCE/CPE	RSA
British Council, Abu Dhabi	60	53	-
British Council, Dubai	209	86	69
St Mary's Catholic High School	95	-	-
International School of Choueifat	54	-	-
Dubai College	65	-	-

Industrial commercial training institutes

The Emirates Bankers Training Institute (EBTI), Sharjah

Established in December 1983 and financed by a levy of two per cent of the payroll of all banks in the UAE, the EBTI was set up to indigenize the banking

system, still largely staffed by foreigners. Courses on every aspect of banking vary from one-day management seminars to four-week trainee courses taught by the EBTI's four specialist staff, and sometimes by banking experts from London.

There is an English Language Department, with a British ESP (Banking) specialist, which runs the English language part of a four-month pre-service banking course designed for school leavers and university graduates. There are also evening and other part-time courses in English for banking staff.

The Arab Maritime Transport Academy (AMTA), Sharjah

Established in 1979 in Sharjah and funded by the Arab League, AMTA takes students from all Arab countries for a two-year training programme in maritime studies. Students are either in the basic studies, or the upgrading sections. Basic studies students are mostly in the 18-22 age group, and have come to the Academy straight from school. Students in the upgrading section have already completed the basic studies course and done a minimum of eighteen months sea-training.

Basic studies are divided into nautical, engineering and radio departments. First-year students in all three departments take a thirty-week course which includes four hours of English per week, making a total of 120 hours. The textbook used in the first year is Streamline Connections. After the first year, the English syllabus is reduce to three hours per week for the nautical and radio sections, while students in the engineering department have two hours per week. The emphasis in the teaching materials is on English in nautical and engineering situations and textbooks in use are English for Maritime Studies and Wavelength.

The upgrading section consists of two sixteen-week courses for Second Mates, and Chief or Maritime Engineers. There are two hours of English per week for each course with the emphasis on either communication at sea (for the Second Mates) or writing skills for the engineers. Textbooks used are Writing Skills and Writing Scientific English.

There are three full-time teachers (British, Lebanese and Syrian), and there is a language laboratory at the Institute.

8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

British Council Institutes, Abu Dhabi and Dubai

Both British Council offices have full-time English Language Teaching Centres, with enrolments (February 1986) of 475 students in Abu Dhabi and 675 in Dubai. The Centres run general English classes (morning, afternoon and evening sessions) for three terms per year, each of ten weeks, with a series of intensive courses, of five weeks' duration, during the summer months. Apart from the general English programmes, there are classes at First Certificate and Proficiency level, as well as classes for O- and A-level English literature and an eight-week TOEFL programme. Most classes consist of four and a half hours tuition per week.

Each Centre has a Director of Studies, recruited via the Overseas Educational Appointments Department of the British Council in London and there are, respectively, four and five British Council London-recruited teacher/level co-ordinators responsible for the teaching programme from beginners level

through to FCE and CPE. The remainder of the EFL teachers in each Centre are part-time staff with a degree, EFL qualification (either from a postgraduate diploma in EFL or the Royal Society of Arts Diploma in EFL and a minimum of three years EFL teaching experience).

NB. Each British Council Centre also has a small Arabic language teaching programme.

Teacher training

To maintain the number of qualified EFL teachers, both Centres provide RSA Preparatory Certificate courses on their premises for people (usually married women living in Abu Dhabi, Dubai or Sharjah) who wish to gain an initial qualification in EFL. The courses last eight weeks and are supervised by British Council staff with an observation visit undertaken by one of the RSA assessors from London. For those who wish to progress to the RSA Diploma in EFL, arrangements are made with International House in London, to enable staff to follow a correspondence course while teaching.

Teaching programme

There is no direct British Council involvement with ELT in the schools, but a major input during the academic year is assistance with the joint Ministry of Education, ELTA-OUP, British Council annual ELT Symposium held in Dubai. The Symposium, which lasts for five days, is attended by all the Inspectors of English. It consists of a series of lectures, workshops and discussion sessions chaired by the Chief Inspector of English, the Ministry of Education Teacher Trainers, or the guest speaker, invited by the Inspectorate. In December 1984, the guest speaker was Dr Mohammad Baghdadi, Lecturer in Linguistics at the University of Qatar, and specialist in English Language Testing; in January, the Ministry invited Dr Mike McCarthy, Head of the Modern Language Research Department at the University of Birmingham, to lead the Symposium.

The Symposium is geared to the government school syllabus: in 1984, the main topic was 'Communicative Testing' and in 1986 'The Teaching of Reading'. A report was written on the proceedings at each Symposium.

Apart from the sessions attended by the Inspectors of English, there is also a public lecture held at the British Council, Dubai, which is open to teachers of English from both government and private schools.

9. AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

None.

10. OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

None.

11. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

A number of language laboratories in schools are in need of extension or replacement and increasing use is being made in company ELT training schemes of computers using CALL programmes, an initiative developed by the British Council in Abu Dhabi.

Reference should be made to the Market Report on Education in Abu Dhabi, April 1986, produced by the Commercial Department of the British Embassy in the UAE which is available from the DTI, Middle East Branch, 1 Victoria Street, London SW1H OET.

12. CREATIVE WRITING

None.

13. CURRENT RESEARCH

None.

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

None.

15. GENERAL STATEMENT

With only about five per cent of UAE nationals engaged in the teaching of English in the school system, the main teaching force consists of Egyptians, Jordanians and Palestinians, many of the first two groups staying for about four years or so and then returning to their own countries. This does not contribute to a stable and effective teaching force. Moreover, the average level of competence among English teachers leaves much to be desired.

The Crescent English Course is now in general use but its success depends on the effectiveness of the in-service courses given to present and new teachers and how far they are able to overcome the conservatism apparent among expatriate Arab teachers. The present CUP/ELTA teacher trainers are leaving this year (1986) but they will be replaced since the job of training and retraining is one that will not go away.

The insistence in all schools that in all subjects the prescribed textbooks should be rigorously followed and finished, regardless of whether pupils have understood or absorbed or received any benefit from it, is an indication of an attitude towards education that is difficult to eradicate. Until flexibility and an eclectic approach geared to the individual needs of learners are adopted, pupils will continue to become disillusioned with their progress - or rather lack of it.

However, at the school level at least, there is an English course (and a reasonably modern one at that) and in-service courses are being run throughout the Emirates with the full co-operation of the Ministry of Education.

At the University, better staffing is necessary for effective general and ESP work. The number of hours available for the tremendous task of trying to remedy the deficiencies of the school system is indequate, especially in the large classes that prevail. The recent proposal to include in the degree course obligatory subject courses taught in English is excellent but there must be appropriate facilities and organization on a faculty level rather than on a central level.